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CHILDREN OF SILENCE.

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CHILDREN OF SILENCE;

OR,

THE STORY

OF A

DEAF AND DUMB CHILD.

The profits to be devoted to the support of the LLANDAFF SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND DUMB. .

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CHILDREN OF SILENCE.

"DEAF AND DUMB!" How easily the words are repeated; but who can tell their full meaning? To be "Deaf" is to be cut off from enjoying the melody of nature, the pleasures of social intercourse, and the persuasive sound of the preacher's voice calling men to hear the Word of God. To be "Deaf and Dumb" is to be condemned to perpetual

and cheerless silence; and if the affliction should have come in early life, it renders the faculties of the mind dormant, confining the nobler part of the child as in a dark prison-house, without one ray of hope to illuminate the path. Indeed it may be said of persons in this lamentable state, "Eyes have they, but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not," and that "God is not in all their thoughts."

Inability to pronounce words, or *dumbness*, invariably follows the loss of hearing in childhood, rendering the affliction doubly severe.

Jesus, when on earth, said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me."

He made no exception; and we are guilty, if, on account of their tender years or bodily infirmity, we keep any from Him. Yet, alas! how often the Deaf and Dumb are overlooked, being considered either too young, or too incapable of receiving instruction respecting the God who made them, and the blessed Saviour who died to redeem us.

The uneducated Deaf and Dumb know nothing of the truths of religion before they are instructed. For information on the subject, I would refer my readers to the valuable remarks of Dr. Peet, "On the notions of the Deaf and Dumb *before* instruction, especially in regard to religious subjects;" also

to the "Anecdotes of the Deaf and Dumb," by the late Dr. Orpen, where numerous facts are given to corroborate our statements. Oh! may the condition of these Children of Silence receive from Christians the sympathy and assistance they so sadly need! When Christ healed the Deaf man who had an impediment in his speech, "it is recorded, that "looking up to heaven, He sighed," as if to intimate to us the intensity of the affliction which He was about to heal. Observe, the Deaf man was *brought* to Jesus; whereas the Blind who were able to hear, came to seek the blessing for themselves.

We propose in these few pages to

shew, that there is no reason why the religious instruction of the Deaf and Dumb should be delayed until they have acquired a knowledge of *written* language, and that even very little children can be made to understand the simple truths of religion, when conveyed to their minds through the medium of "SIGNS." He who made the human mind, has so constituted it, that His Gospel is as needful to it, as light is to the eye.

WILLIAM DE COURCY, was the fourth child of poor but respectable parents, living at Haverfordwest, in Pembrokeshire. Being born Deaf, he was con-

sequently Dumb. He was always a delicate child; and as his affliction isolated him from the society of hearing and speaking children, he clung the the more closely to his mother, who tenderly watched over him. Separation seemed only to increase the intensity of his affection, and any reference to her always delighted him.

The affliction was a sad blow to the parents; but as nothing could be done to remove it, they learned to bow in submission to the will of God; knowing that He doeth all things well. God's dealings with His people are often perplexing; but we are assured "that all things work together for good

to them that love God;" and from experience can believe, that blessing is always for them mingled in the cup of suffering.

The parents knew that, although it was not in the power of man to give hearing to their child, the case was not hopeless, while other channels were left open whereby the mind could be reached. The mother was very anxious that her child should be early taught the truths of religion. Remembering, that parents are enjoined to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," she did all that a pious and judicious parent could do for her little one. As soon as he

was able to go, she sent him with his sisters and a younger brother, to the Sunday-school and the Parish Church; where, although he did not know the meaning of what was said, he imitated the gestures of the congregation in the solemn worship of God.

He had never *heard* the glad sound of the Gospel, nor the song of praise; and everything that took place at Church or in the Sunday-school, except what impressed the sight, was veiled in mystery. Yet, the habit of attending public worship was not lost upon him: he had learnt to act with reverence in the house of God; and afterwards when he came to School, he learned to revere

His word, His name, and the Sabbath-day. He soon became particularly delighted with the name of Jesus. That "name which is above every name," seemed, to have a peculiar charm for him. His tender mind could just catch a single ray of light; but that ray beamed from the face of his Redeemer, and he rejoiced in it. He knew very little else: the world was a blank to him, and he shrank from contact with it. To be pillowed on his mother's bosom, and feeling that Jesus loved him, and to have his soul drawn out to love Jesus, was all he wanted, all he cared for.

But we are anticipating. Let us go

back, and contemplate that poor mother with her Deaf and Dumb child; all the more dear to her because of his affliction, urging her plea for help to enable her to send him to school. Alas! she found, what many others have found, that those who have this world's goods, too often shut up their bowels of compassion. There was nothing in his appearance to touch the feelings, and to *claim* the sympathy of a superficial observer. He could see as well as other children; and he had the use of his limbs like other children. Where then was her peculiar claim? Ah! they did not consider how severely the affliction stultified the mind of her poor child:

how under that fair form, the soul lay buried in darkness. Had they thought of this, doutless the pitiable case would have met with more favour than it did, for the public are not generally unkind, and help is always forthcoming in deserving cases which are known to be such.

At length God answered the sorrowing mother's prayers. A kind Christian lady, the wife of a clergyman in Haverfordwest, became interested in the little boy. Having noticed his attendance at the Sunday-school, she was touched with his infirmity, and most kindly exerted herself in his behalf. She soon raised among Christian friends suffi-

cient funds to send the poor mute to a school for the Deaf and Dumb.

He was now twelve years of age; but so very diminutive, as to appear not more than eight or nine. At first he was very shy, and kept aloof from his school-fellows. For a long time he took no interest, whatever, in their sports, but was self-willed, and occasionally obstinate. By degrees he became more sociable, although his temper remained the same; and it was not until after his first serious illness, that we noticed the change which had been wrought in him. This illness caused us so much alarm, we were glad to hasten his return home, that he might

have the benefit of his native air, and of a mother's loving care and nursing. It pleased God to restore him to health; and the lady who had before been so unwearied in her kindness, again befriended him, and sent him to the school at LLANDAFF. We had accordingly the pleasure and satisfaction of once more undertaking his education; and so rejoiced was he to return, that he literally shouted for joy when he recognised his friend and teacher waiting at the Railway Station to receive him. He knew it was good to be at school; and being among friends, he was pleased with the place. He was now sociable, and soon became fond

of childish sports. The house often rang with his merry laugh, and he thoroughly enjoyed life. Every day he appeared to gather strength, and for a time bid fair for life. His temper which before had been stubborn and petulant, was now happily subdued. He became obedient, and was affectionate, not to his mother alone, but to his school-fellows, and all in the house. We felt thankful for the change which had taken place. It was now truly a pleasure to have him with us; he was so loving and tender-hearted, and careful not to grieve any one by his conduct. After this, although many little things happened which might

have afforded him some excuse, I never saw him give way to temper. He had learnt to put away anger, malice, and guile, and to be kind and forgiving.

The Deaf and Dumb are usually fond of animals, and a farm yard with its pigs and poultry always affords them pleasure. William had been taught to be kind to animals, because God made them. He watched the little birds with much interest, and liked to feed them. There was one which came daily to be fed, which he used to call *his bird.*

In school his progress was satisfactory. He learned nouns and arithmetic;

and worked out the extended multiplication table with very little assistance, so soon as he discerned the principle upon which it was constructed. He had not been long enough at school to understand written composition; and his learning had been so much interrupted by illness, that an acquaintance with isolated nouns and a few adjectives, was the extent of his knowledge of *verbal language.* But he had imbibed a considerable amount of religious knowledge, from the instructions which had been given to the pupils in the school, by means of the "SIGN" Language. It would have taken years to convey the same amount of information to him

in words, written, or spelt on his fingers. Is not this an evidence that the religious instruction of the Deaf and Dumb need not be delayed until they have mastered the construction of sentences? Long before that their understandings can be reached through the medium of their own natural language, *i. e.*, the SIGN Language. He knew that God made him; that Jesus was his best Friend; that sin was displeasing to God; that the righteous would see Jesus in glory, and be with Him; that bad people would be cast out of God's sight, and be punished; that he would die, and that his body would be put in the grave; that

the dead will be raised up at the last day; that God watched over him; that holy angels dwell with Jesus in heaven. All this, and much more he understood, as only a child can understand these things. His "SIGNS" about them were clear and satisfactory, for he had not yet learnt to doubt. Yet, if a single question had been proposed to him in writing, or spelt to him on the fingers, he could not have answered it.

Dr. Peet, of New York, remarks on this subject that, "The teacher of the Deaf and Dumb is almost precisely in the condition of a Missionary to the heathen. He must first learn *their* language, and after that, seek to make

it better adapted to the communication of spiritual ideas; but he need not, and does not defer the preaching of the Gospel till they learn *his* own language."

The older scholars rendered assistance to the younger children by "*signing*" to them about these things. Since his death I have discovered that the pupils were in the habit of "*signing*" to each other in their own room, the religious lessons they had been taught in the school, and of asking questions respecting them from the housekeeper. Little William was always the most attentive of the group. He never tired of his favourite themes, heaven and Jesus.

Little did we think that the Lord was about to remove the dear child from us, and had been preparing him for his departure. His thoughts seemed to be absorbed with religious subjects; and religion was connected with everything he did. If he ate, God sent him the food, and he thanked Him for it. At night before he retired to rest, he would use his little simple prayer, "Lord, bless me." He delighted in going over "The Pictorial Illustrations of the Gospel History" used in the school, explaining them, as far as he was able, to the pupils who had only been there a short time. Whenever the opportunity occurred, he always

alluded to Jesus, and let us know that he loved Him.

On Sunday, December 13th, I was obliged to leave him at home on account of his lameness. He was in tears at this, and signed to the housekeeper that he wished to go to Church; but she succeeded in composing him. He then pointed out to her some large Scripture prints on the walls, "The Nativity," "Christ blessing little Children," "The Crucifixion," &c., and signed that the Babe in the manger at Bethlehem was Jesus, "GOOD": It was Jesus who blessed little children, "GOOD," and Jesus on the Cross, still "GOOD": that the man with the spear

was a cruel, bad man. He asked, "Why the women were weeping at the Cross?" "Whether she (S. E.) loved Jesus?" He had now done with attendance in the earthly courts of God's house. The choristers in the Cathedral had attracted his attention; and he "signed" to her that he would be a singing boy. The words were prophetic. The time of his departure was at hand; yet we still had hopes of his recovery. *Apparently*, there was nothing ailing the child, except his lameness; and that seemed to yield a little. But we kept him quite within doors; and let him have as much rest as possible.

Christmas day passed, and he seemed better; but a few days after he appeared dull and heavy. We gave him a little simple medicine, which seemed to revive him, and not having seen him so cheerful for some time, I was enabled to give a more favourable account of him to his mother. On Friday night, after having had his leg rubbed with liniment, he was put early to bed, as we thought a good night's rest would almost set him right. But during the night he grew worse; and early on Saturday morning (January 2nd) I was called up to see him. A medical man was instantly sent for, and promptly obeyed the summons. It was very

evident that death was upon the lad. I "signed" to him, when he became a little composed, that Jesus was kind: he looked at me for a few moments earnestly, and signed in affirmation—"Yes, Jesus *is* kind."

After this he fell into an unconscious slumber, and continued in this state till 3 o'clock P.M. on Thursday, January 7th, when his happy spirit took its flight to that land where there are none Deaf and Dumb.

What a change for him to have his ears unstopped, to join the chorus of the redeemed in praise of Him who when on earth, made "the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak!" He had

never heard a bad word on earth; and God in mercy took him from the evil he might have seen. We mourn his loss; but he has gone "to be with Christ, which is far better."

His mother was with us when he died. We removed his body to Haverfordwest, and committed it to the ground, the Sunday following, in "sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection." It was borne to the grave by six of the elder scholars of St. Mary's Church Sunday Schools who loved him while living, and mourned him when dead. About 400 Sunday Scholars, and several persons belonging to the town followed in procession.

The following verses were sung at his grave:—

"Joyfully, joyfully, onward we move,
Bound to the land of bright spirits above;
Jesus, our Saviour, in mercy says 'Come,
Joyfully, joyfully, haste to your home.'

Soon will our pilgrimage end here below,
Soon to the presence of God we shall go;
Then if to Jesus our hearts have been giv'n,
Joyfully, joyfully, rest we in heav'n.

Teachers and scholars have pass'd on before;
Waiting, they watch us approaching the shore,
Singing to cheer us, while passing along,
'Joyfully, joyfully, haste to your home.'

Songs of sweet music there ravish the ear;
Harps of the blessed, your strains we shall hear,
Filling with harmony heaven's high dome,
'Joyfully, joyfully, Jesus we come!'

Death with his arrow may soon lay us low;
Safe in our Saviour, we fear not the blow;
Jesus hath broken the bars of the tomb,
Joyfully, joyfully, will we go home!

Bright will the morn of eternity dawn,
Death shall be conquered, his sceptre be gone;
Over the plains of sweet Canaan we'll roam,
Joyfully, joyfully, safely at home!"

A PLEA FOR THE DEAF AND DUMB.

Dear reader, let us give God the glory! Amen.

Ask yourself "What can I do, or induce others to do, to help to bring the poor Deaf and Dumb to Jesus?"

Much has been done of late to ameli-

orate the condition of the Deaf and Dumb. Schools have been established, in which they are taught the saving truths of our most holy religion; and much good has resulted. Still their condition is far from satisfactory. They do not remain sufficiently long under training to acquire that knowledge of written language which is necessary to enable them to mingle in social life with comfort; and their consequent ignorance and helplessness expose them to many temptations.

There are districts even in our own highly favoured country in which the Deaf and Dumb seem to be almost lost sight of, where they do not share as

they should in the benefits of scholastic education, nor is any provision made for their spiritual necessities; whereas children who can hear and speak have schools everywhere, in which they are taught their duties to God and man.

The Deaf and Dumb are not thus favoured. Schools are required for them where none at present exist; and those which are established need better support, that the charges for board and lodging may be reduced for the advantage of the poor.

The Deaf and Dumb require *special instruction.* They cannot be taught like hearing and speaking children. Although there is very little material to

work upon, the task is not hopeless. The spark once kindled, if fanned, will burn brighter, until the mind beams with intelligence, and life is felt to be a preparation for a higher and better state of existence. Few persons have any clear idea of the isolated condition of the deaf mute. In many cases the education of this afflicted class is sadly neglected; and we desire that the perusal of the foregoing encouraging, though painful, narrative, may arouse some public sympathy and active Christian benevolence for both the temporal and spiritual welfare of these suffering ones.

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